

Kacanek D, Binson D, Sosman JM, MacGowan RJ, Eldridge GD, Fitzgerald C, Nealey-Moore J, Flanigan T, and the Project START Study Group. Barriers to and facilitators of HIV and STD testing among young incarcerated men in the United States. XIV International Conference on AIDS; July 7–12, 2002; Barcelona Spain. Abstract MoPeE3793.

Background: While expanded HIV and STD testing has been recommended to reduce transmission of HIV and other STDs among populations at risk, little is known about young incarcerated men's perceptions of HIV and STD testing. This study analyzed barriers to and facilitators of HIV and STD testing among 18-29 year-old men in prison.

Methods: Qualitative interviews were conducted with incarcerated men (n=105) in 4 US states as part of a longitudinal study to develop an HIV/STD prevention intervention for men being released from prison. Interviews were thematically coded and analyzed.

Results: Most incarcerated men were tested for HIV while in prison. Some said it was mandatory or felt they would be punished if they refused, while others tested "to be safe" or because it was free. At most sites, men understood that "no news is good news," believing they were HIV or STD-negative since they never received results in prison. Their experience on the outside was different. Outside they avoided HIV testing because they lacked time or resources, feared knowing the results, didn't know where to get tested, or didn't perceive themselves at risk. While 37% of men reported an STD other than HIV in their lifetime, and many said they had had STD symptoms, most delayed getting an STD test on the outside. For men who did not seek STD testing, the most common reason was lack of symptoms. A major barrier to all testing was that men testing for STDs or HIV as part of a routine checkup or upon entry to prison thought they were tested for all STDs, and since many did not receive their results, they believed they had no infections.

Conclusions: The barriers to HIV testing outside of prison include misinformation, fear of knowing the results, and lack of resources. Whether inside or outside of prison, HIV/STD prevention programs for young men need to address barriers to HIV and STD testing, emphasize that STDs can be asymptomatic, and communicate benefits of rapid detection and treatment.